

Message Text

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S E C R E T JERUSALEM 2107

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM ATHERTON

U.S. DEL NO. 35

3.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (ATHERTON, ALFRED L., JR.)
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN-AUGUST 2

1. FOLLOWING LEWIS' AND MY PRIVATE MEETING WITH BEGIN AND DAYAN (SPETEL, MEETING OF LARGER GROUP INCLUDING YADIN AND WEIZMAN WAS RELATIVELY SHORT AND SOMBER IN ATMOSPHERE. I LED OFF BY PROVIDING A BRIEFING ON OUR TALKS IN EGYPT ENDING WITH MY OWN ASSESSMENT ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES. I SAID I DID NOT THINK SADAT WAS ABANDONING HIS INITIATIVE; ON THE OTHER HAND IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO CONSIDER HIS ACTION A MERE TACTICAL PLOY. I SAW THREE EXPLANATIONS FOR HIS ACTION: (A) RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, SADAT GENUINELY BELIEVES THE RESPONSE FROM ISRAEL TO HIS INITIATIVE HAS BEEN INADEQUATE; (B) AS LAST NOVEMBER, HE WAS EMPLOYING A SUDDEN MOVE TO DRAMATIZE TO THE WORLD HIS POSITION THAT NEGOTIATIONS CAN'T SUCCEED UNTIL BASIC PRINCIPLES ARE AGREED, AND HIS STARTING POINT IS THE LANGUAGE ON NON-ACQUISITION OF TERRITORY BY WAR IN RESOLUTION 242; (C) IN THE ABSENCE OF PROGRESS, HE HAD TO PAY INCREASING ATTENTION TO ARAB AND IN PARTICULAR SAUDI VIEWS ABOUT THE PEACE PROCESS--

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 JERUSA 02107 022129Z

VIEWS THAT ARE INCREASINGLY SHARED BY BROAD ELEMENTS OF EGYPTIAN OPINION. IT COULD BE THAT SADAT FELT HE HAD TO TAKE THIS STEP TO BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO RESIST ARAB PRESSURES TO ABANDON HIS INITIATIVE ALTOGETHER, BUT BY THE SAME TOKEN IT MOVED HIM CLOSER TO THE POSITION OF THE OTHER NON-REJECTIONIST ARABS.

2. WHEN I FINISHED BEGIN LAUNCHED INTO A LENGTHY EXPLANATION,

WHICH WAS NOTABLE FOR ITS DEFENSIVENESS, OF THE AL-ARISH UNILATERAL GESTURE BUSINESS. HE SAID SADAT'S PRIVATE COMMENTS TO WEIZMAN ABOUT THIS SHOULD NEVER HAVE LEAKED OUT: THIS WAS THE PRICE ISRAEL HAD TO PAY FOR ITS DEMOCRACY. A MESSAGE OF "APOLOGY" HAD BEEN SENT VIA THE WEIZMAN-GAMASY CHANNEL. BUT THE LETTER THAT SADAT SUBSEQUENTLY SENT HAD BEEN APPROVED BY THE WHOLE CABINET WITH ONLY ONE DISSENTING VOTE. BEGIN SAW NOTHING WRONG WITH THE "SOMETHING FOR NOTHING" PHRASE, CLAIMING IT TO BE "LIKE A PROVERB, WHICH ANY CHILD WOULD UNDERSTAND."

3. BEGIN THEN, IN TERMS OF SORROW RATHER THAN ANGER, AND REACHING MOMENTS OF SOME ELOQUENCE, SAID THAT IT WAS SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE FOR SADAT TO BE INSULTED BY THE THEME THAT THE PEACE PROCESS HAD TO BE CHARACTERIZED BY RECIPROCITY. SADAT ONLY WANTED TO NEGOTIATE ABOUT THE THINGS THAT HE WANTED FROM ISRAEL, BUT NOT WHAT ISRAEL WANTED FROM HIM. "WE ARE NOT PREPARED FOR ULTIMATUMS. HE JUST CANNOT DICTATE TO US. HIS WORDS MAY BE SACRED IN EGYPT, NOT HERE. WE WILL MAKE IT CLEAR TO THE WORLD." IT WAS PREPOSTEROUS FOR SADAT TO THINK THAT EITHER HIS GOVERNMENT OR ANY ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WOULD AGREE TO EXCLUDE TERRITORY FROM NEGOTIATIONS. THE TERRITORIAL QUESTION IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA WAS A MATTER OF "LIFE AND DEATH" FOR ISRAELIS. BEGIN ALLUDED TO PERES' STATEMENT THAT IF THE TERM TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE WERE "EVEN JUST MENTIONED," AGREEMENT WITH SADAT WOULD BE POSSIBLE. THE EMPTINESS OF THAT POSITION HAD NOW BEEN REVEALED BY SADAT'S LATEST ACTION. BEGIN ENDED BY SAYING A FURTHER
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 JERUSA 02107 022129Z

TRIPARTITE MEETING WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO HIM, BUT NOT AT THE PRICE OF ACCEPTING SADAT'S ONE-SIDED CONCEPT OF NEGOTIATIONS.

4. WE TOUCHED ON SEVERAL OTHER ASPECTS BRIEFLY WHICH WILL BE REPORTED IN THE FULL MEMCON COMING BY SEPARATE TELEGRAM. THE MEETING ENDED WITH A DISCUSSION OF THE LATEST SITUATION IN LEBANON WHICH WILL ALSO BE REPORTED SEPARATELY.

5. COMMENT: THE MOOD ON THE PART OF THE ASSEMBLED ISRAELIS WAS SOBER AND EVEN SOMEWHAT DOWNCAST. THEY CLEARLY DID NOT HAVE VERY MUCH TO SAY, AND I HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY HAVE YET TO DECIDE AMONG THEMSELVES HOW PRECISELY TO PROCEED ALTHOUGH BEGIN HIMSELF WAS QUITE FORCEFUL AND UNABMIGUOUS. BEGIN DID MAKE IT CLEAR HE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DISCUSSIONS HE WILL BE HAVING WITH YOU. HE ALSO SAID HE WOULD NOT BE TRYING "TO RECIPROCATATE" BY GETTING INTO A PUBLIC SLINGING MATCH WITH SADAT IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, WHICH WILL BE HELPFUL IF HE STICKS TO IT. BUT THAT STATEMENT WILL AT BEST LAST UNTIL YOUR ARRIVAL.

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